

# Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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## Lay Co-Operation

The work of making disciples is the privilege and the responsibility of both the preacher and the lay believer. The record of the doings of the early church as set forth in the Acts of the Apostles is evidence that in those days of primitive Christianity the ordinary believer was as earnestly engaged in evangelizing the people as were the apostles, tho his methods of work were not the same. The Lord had a special work for the apostles, a work which only they could do, but tho their work was different, or rather their methods of work, yet they were actuated by the same motive, and had the same object in view—the salvation of souls. In bearing witness to Christ and his resurrection the humblest disciple was on an equality with the chief of the apostles. One of the chief elements of success of the early church was lay activity and lay co-operation. That period of the Christian church when her greatest triumphs were won was marked by extraordinary lay activity, and down thru all the centuries since the beginning of Christianity as an organized force, the achievements of the church have been in exact proportion to the activity and co-operation of the lay membership. And so it will ever be. With the decline of lay activity began the decline of the power of the church of the first centuries. We read of the daughters of Philip and the famous Priscilla, together with numerous other women whom Paul mentions as having rendered him practical service, so that not men only, but women also were engaged in the blessed work of evangelizing their neighbors.

If there is to be a revival of primitive Christianity, followed by the gratifying results which characterized the early church, there must be first of all a return to that primitive idea that the making of disciples is a privilege and a responsibility that belong both to the preacher and the lay member, and until there is unity of action and purpose between the pulpit and the pew, the work of evangelization will not move forward with gratifying results. Unity of feeling and purpose and action was one of the chief characteristics of the church of the first century. The joy of one was the joy of all; the sorrow of one was the sorrow of all; the work of one was the work of all, whether preacher or lay member. Let us turn to the record and read the story, and learn the secret of the life and power of the church of that early period. After the conversion, the baptism,

and accession to the church, of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, St. Luke, in his simple but exquisitely beautiful language, describes the characteristics of this body of primitive believers as follows: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." This is the divine record of how the members of the early church lived. It is evidence that the leaven of a new life had entered into humanity, destined in time to revolutionize society and establish a new brotherhood, the brotherhood of man founded on the Fatherhood of God thru Christ his Son, our elder brother. Not least among the characteristics of this new brotherhood of man is the recognition of absolute equality, the eradication of all class and caste distinctions, the complete unity of thought, purpose, and action, in both the lay and official membership.

A revival of the primitive idea of the brotherhood and equality of man, and more particularly the idea of lay activity and co-operation will be followed by new life and power in the churches. The divorce of the pulpit and the pew is an unfortunate division. The power of the laity has not been properly developed and applied. The power is there, but the pulpit has not been faithful in giving forth that instruction which is calculated to awaken, draw out, develop and apply it. Whenever the ministerial office is unduly magnified, and the right to teach and preach made the exclusive privilege of the pulpit, then the work of soul winning on the part of the laity begins to decline. Every believer should be made to feel his responsibility in seeking out the unevangelized, take up the message of the pulpit and pass it on to those who are without. The great revival of Christianity to which the signs of the times point must begin in the pulpit. Let the pulpit become evangelistic in its teaching and methods, and the pew will catch the inspiration, and lay activity and responsibility be restored.